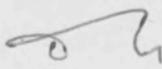


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Speech at the opening of the New Ireland Forum
by Mr. Charles J. Haughey, T.D. on Monday, 30th
May, 1983

Today is an historic occasion. For the first time in sixty years political parties North and South, who support the restoration of Irish unity by peaceful means, have come together to determine what new political structures are needed to achieve peace and stability on this island. Our purpose is to construct a basic position, which can then be put to an all-round constitutional conference, convened by the Irish and British Governments as a prelude to British withdrawal. The parties gathered here represent a weight of opinion that cannot easily be ignored or dismissed. Together they represent the overwhelming majority of Nationalist opinion on this island, and a clear majority of the Irish people as a whole.

Early in this century a great unified effort was required to secure independence in the greater part of this island. A similar concerted effort is now required to finally secure an end to the tragic problem that Northern Ireland represents today.

Despite the impressive membership and the historic surroundings, this Forum will only succeed in its political objectives, if we recognise the realities. Our work must be informed by a clear understanding of the problems if it is to lead to a permanent solution.

The first of these realities is that peace and stability cannot be secured without a withdrawal of the British military and political presence from Northern Ireland as the Minister for Foreign Affairs has recently emphasised. In saying this we are neither diminishing the importance of any other aspect or denying the need to safeguard and protect the Northern Unionist population. Anyone who stands back from the situation can see clearly that it is the British military and political presence which distorts the situation in Northern Ireland and inhibits the normal process by which peace and stability emerge elsewhere. That process can only develop and peace and stability

be secured under new all-Ireland structures in the context of which an orderly British withdrawal can take place.

The present situation in Northern Ireland is not primarily the fault of anyone living there. It is the cumulative effect of British policy in Ireland over many hundreds of years; a fact which any British Government which wishes to solve the problem must start by recognising.

It is common ground amongst us in this Forum that we are prepared to work in close cooperation with any British Government to bring forward a solution to a problem that continuously distorts Anglo-Irish relations and relations within this island because no British Government will be able to provide any solution to the problem other than in partnership with the Irish Government.

The concept of a Council for a new Ireland which gave rise to this New Ireland Forum arose out of the political circumstances of last year. In the face of an unacceptable British Government initiative, which placed the political representatives of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland in an impossible position, some alternative action was needed. The Nationalist people in Northern Ireland could not accept that there was no further useful role for Nationalist constitutional politics. This Forum was conceived as an alternative to a total stalemate.

The British Government cannot be allowed to play the role of disinterested peacemaker between warring factions. Britain is in fact, whether she recognises it or not acting in a partisan role, supporting unconditionally the basic Unionist position, by military, political and economic power. The present Northern Ireland Assembly, a Unionist-dominated body, has been explicitly stated by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to be designed to tie Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom forever.

The parties represented here today have come together on the basis of a common purpose. We believe, first of all, that it is only in the context of Irish unity that a lasting solution to the Northern Ireland problem can be found and, secondly, that Irish unity can only come about by the use of constitutional political means.

Northern Ireland was founded on the threat of civil war and has rested ever since on an unhappy foundation of civil and military power. Thirteen years of violence and 2,000 deaths have brought sorrow, bitterness and frustration.

The British Army, sent in 1969 to pacify the province and uphold the constitutional position, has manifestly failed in its task.

Perhaps its task was impossible anyhow and the repression of the civilian population that has taken place inevitable. The paramilitary organisations have nothing to show either but a legacy of hatred and suspicion.

Partition was brought forward over sixty years ago to solve a political problem but has totally failed to do so over that long period. Another political solution must now be found.

Ulster has long played a pivotal role in Irish life. From Ulster Christian missionaries went forth to Scotland, and St. Columba's island of Iona symbolises the link between all the people of these islands.

The siege of Derry and the battle of the Boyne, the birth of Republicanism among the Presbyterians of Belfast, the meeting of the Irish Volunteers in Dungannon - these and many other events had a profound effect on the course of Irish history. Modern Ireland reflects these events and happenings and while Ulster has often been the scene of conflict and antagonisms it has also been a source of courage, inspiration and patriotism.

The discussions in the New Ireland Forum must be founded on respect for the Unionist tradition, but also and equally on respect for our own. In Ireland today we all are what we are; we must accept each other as we are neither apologising nor condemning, but working to find solutions on the basis of mutual tolerance and acceptance. What independent Ireland has built up over the last sixty years is the natural foundation of the new Ireland but we do not see unity in terms of the people of the North being absorbed into or annexed by the Republic. It is instead a question of building the new Ireland with their help and participation, using the materials that we have

both North and South, benefitting from our respective experience and the institutions that we have developed.

The new Ireland must be firmly based on agreement and consent. There have been attempts to create confusion and misunderstanding as to what this would mean from those living in the South. The belief has been canvassed that we would have to jettison almost the entire ethos on which the independence movement was built and that the Irish identity has to be sacrificed to facilitate the achievement of Irish unity. Nothing could be more erroneous or destructive.

In this part of Ireland we have much to be proud of in what has been achieved since independence. We need apologise to nobody about the character or performance of our State, and we do not intend to do so. Independent Ireland was founded on the ideal that all the children of nation would be cherished equally and in broad measure we have been faithful to that ideal, particularly in respect of political and religious minorities. If there have been blemishes, they are small ones and not necessarily all on the one side.

The challenge is to find a way of accommodating our different strongly held beliefs and cultural values, rather than to suppress or supplant one by another. We accept without reservation the right of the people of Northern Ireland to retain the way of life to which they are accustomed and to the full expression of their identity and their beliefs.

Agreement and consent means that the political arrangements in Ireland to be established following the cessation of the British military and political presence will have to be negotiated, agreed and consented to by the people of Ireland, North and South, or by their political representatives acting on their behalf.

Partition, the State of Northern Ireland itself, was never legitimate from a democratic point of view and cannot be made so. But we readily and willingly concede that the establishment of a new political order in Ireland and a new social contract can only come about through a major revision of existing structures.

I believe that a new constitution will be required for a new Ireland . A united Ireland would represent a constitutional change of such magnitude as to demand a new constitution. That constitution in our view, can only be formulated at an all-round constitutional conference in which all sections of the Irish people North and South would participate. It is only in this way that we can provide all the appropriate safeguards and guarantees required for the security and protection of every section of the Irish community.

The divergent practice which has been followed in many matters, not just matters of a conscientious or moral nature, North and South, means that complete harmonisation of laws, administrative practices and social structures may only be possible, if carried out over a gradual and perhaps extended period. We may have to consider some degree of autonomy for Northern Ireland, be it on the basis of the same area, or a smaller one. We have the example, in the state of Great Britain for instance, of Scotland with its own legal system and its own educational system, an administration in Edinburgh, a Cabinet minister, and a grand committee of Scottish M.P.s in Westminster who legislate on Scottish affairs.

Eamon de Valera's offer in 1938 which would have allowed for the continuation of a subsidiary parliament, was based on the principle that sovereignty would be transferred from Britain to Ireland, but that Northern Ireland would continue to enjoy the autonomy it possessed at that time. How relevant that concept is today must be considered in the light of all that has happened since and in particular the fact that in 1972 the Government and Parliament of Northern Ireland were abolished, in recognition of the fact that the State of Northern Ireland could no longer function as a political entity.

Our deliberations must have regard to the practical considerations militating against the setting up of two, or possibly three, Governments and parliaments in this small island whether they are in a relationship of equality or subordination to each other. Ireland is too small to need or support elaborate tiers of Government.

We shall, I hope, look with open minds on a

variety of different political structures. We would greatly wish to have full Northern participation in an Irish Government and Parliament from the beginning. At present, Northern politicians play no direct role in the government of Northern Ireland. From that frustration there naturally arises a fear among Unionists that in a new Ireland they might also be without power or influence and the people they represent discriminated against.

A proposal which must be maturely examined is that for a specified transitional period power should be shared in the island as a whole. In an extended and reconstituted Government for the whole island arrangements could be devised to guarantee adequate participation in government by Northern representatives.

A matter of equal importance is the status of Ireland's relations with Britain and with other countries. A new Ireland would be a sovereign independent state: the Irish Republic desired by generations since the day of the first Belfast republicans of the late 18th century. That Republic could develop structures, relationships, associations of a bilateral or multilateral kind with Britain that would not compromise our sovereignty and independence, but would give recognition to their long established links with Britain of those who adhere to the Unionist tradition in Ireland.

It goes without saying that no one possessing British citizenship would be deprived of it and it ought to be possible to negotiate for the continuation and passing on of such citizenship rights to those who valued them.

We recognise that Britain has her own defence requirements. In this Forum we shall advocate the principle already stated that Ireland would never allow her territory to be used as a base for attack on Britain and would be prepared to enter into a treaty arrangement needed for that purpose.

This Forum will necessarily concentrate much of its attention on the economic implications of unity.

As a general principle there is no reason why this

whole island with all its known resources and those still to be explored should not develop to the same level of material prosperity as has been reached anywhere else in Europe.

The establishment of a lasting peace in Ireland would bring very considerable economic benefits to both parts of Ireland, some of them immediately, others in the long-term. The whole island, but particularly Northern Ireland, would become a much more attractive location for investment. The tourist industry would revive immediately and dramatically. The heavy burden of security would be greatly reduced.

Joining the two parts of Ireland together would produce economies of scale and open up a variety of possibilities for advantageous cooperation. The enlargement of the domestic market for both parts of Ireland would be a major benefit in itself. Joint investment, export and tourism promotion programmes would bring benefits to the whole island, and would give Northern Ireland the benefit of access to what are universally acknowledged as successful State agencies in the South. Cooperation in transport and communications; in developing our agricultural structures and markets would bring immediate and substantial benefits.

In economic and political terms as a nation of five million people we would be a country comparable in size and international status with many of the Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway or Finland. The interests of both parts of the country could be more effectively promoted from this unified base. At present the voice of Northern Ireland is scarcely heard at all, overshadowed as it is by that of London. This Forum should be able to demonstrate to the political representatives of Northern Ireland that sharing in the leadership of this country and of this island, and having a voice in international Councils, is infinitely preferable to continuing in a kind of political limbo that is their position at present.

There can no longer be any doubt left in anyone's mind about the desire in the nationalist philosophy to promote the economic welfare of this island as a whole North and South. The Republic has offered Kinsale gas to the North on reasonable

terms; we subsidise the Dublin/Derry air service. We are pursuing actively the possibility of arranging for engineering and shipbuilding contracts to go northward. The one Member of the European Parliament representing the Nationalist community of Northern Ireland has diligently sought to promote the economic welfare of Northern Ireland right across the board in Brussels and has had the whole-hearted support of his Southern colleagues in his efforts.

We can, I suggest, envisage an economic transitional period of reasonable length between the new Ireland and the old. It would be reasonable to request the British Government to make a major contribution to assisting the transition by economic and financial measures.

There would almost certainly be a willingness in the European community to contribute to investment in economic infrastructure and firm indications have already been given of U.S. willingness to participate in the economic development of a united Ireland.

This New Ireland Forum, if we adhere to clear objectives, can certainly mark a new phase in progress towards a lasting and peaceful solution throughout Ireland. This time last year we celebrated the bicentenary of Grattan's Parliament and the declaration of independence of 1782. The national unity of 1782 was all too brief a moment of exhilaration but like other movements in Irish history it inspired many succeeding generations.

It was here in Dublin Castle, two and a half years ago, that a British Prime Minister acknowledged that the problem of Northern Ireland could only be solved by the joint action of the two sovereign Governments. It is with that truth clearly in our minds that this Forum takes the first steps along the road to a final constitutional settlement.

Unionist and Nationalist, Protestant and Catholic all share the one island, and are deeply attached to its soil. All belong and have a contribution to make to our common country. We may not have chosen one another as neighbours, but it is as neighbours we have to live. Nobody else can settle for us the problems we have or think we have as neighbours. We have to solve them together or they will remain unsolved with all the

cost in material terms and human suffering that this will entail.

The time is ripe for a new start. It is our duty to rekindle the spirit and the political energies of the nation. The people of the North, as part of the people of Ireland, have a long tradition of resilience and courage, which in the past has been put to the service of Ireland. The descendants of those that led this nation in the past, the United Irishmen of the North who made the mental break with the British connection and who thereby altered the whole mould of Irish history, not merely have a future on this island, but are in a position to help guide its destinies. The pride of the people of the North in their province, in what they have painstakingly built, is a virtue that we admire. They have now, as they had before, an opportunity to help lead a country of five million people, and to take a place of honour in its Government. This surely is preferable to being a neglected offshore annex of the island of Great Britain.

I am certain that ways can be found of reconciling even our most fundamental aspirations, and that by coming together we can create a prosperity which will elude us so long as we remain divided.

We seek to broaden the base of the society that is founded upon the Irish nation with equal treatment for all, in which there will be no domination or exploitation of particular groups, communities or regions. When we finally come together, we will enjoy the support and encouragement of friendly nations, who will gladly welcome the healing of our divisions.

Reconciliation needs the support of political structures. Aspirations and platitudes are not enough. It will only be through new political structures in a new political context that the reconciliation of the different Irish traditions will be achieved, without loss of identity or abandonment of old loyalties, and in which all traditions will find their representation as of right. These new structures if they are wisely planned will enable us to banish discrimination, bias and confrontation from Ireland forever - an objective which surely merits our best endeavours and total commitment.

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